**QUESTION:** How do we use language to mention individual items so as to make claims about them?

**ANSWER:** We mention them by using certain expressions. Inspection of our linguistic habits suggests that these expressions are proper names, demonstratives (e.g., *he, she, you*), indexicals (e.g., *I, now*), and definite descriptions. Call this grouping the *referring expressions*.

**Russell:** We are looking at these expressions in the context of making a claim, so we are working with them insofar as they form a part of sentences that make claims, i.e., sentences that are *significant*. A sentence is significant iff it expresses a complete proposition. The type of proposition (i.e., the type of meaning) expressed by a significant sentence is determined by the logical form of that sentence. For example, a Subject/Predicate (S/P) sentence will express a proposition that is constituted by the thing referred to by the expression in the subject place and the property ascribed to that object by the predicative expression. Call this a *singular proposition*.

The sentence has as its meaning the proposition, and the parts of the sentence have as their meanings the contributions they make to the proposition. The expressions that occupy the subject role in such sentences contribute the item that is this proposition is *about*, and so this item (i.e., the *referent*) is the meaning of the subject expression. An example of such an expression would be a proper name, such as "Scott". (You know, the author of *Waverley*.) A S/P sentence with an empty name (i.e., a name without a referent) in the subject role fails to be significant because it does not express a complete proposition—it expresses a proposition that has a hole where the contribution of the name should be. Now if referring expressions mention items, then these items must be their meanings; furthermore, if they have items as their meanings, then they will be able to fill the subject role in significant S/P sentences.

Let's take a look at definite descriptions. Consider the sentence, "The unicorn is tired." This is surely a significant sentence, and it appears to be a S/P sentence; therefore, we can conclude that the expression, "the unicorn", mentions an individual item. Alas, it does not—Meinong was wrong. So what gives? Well, since it doesn't refer to an item, the sentence must either fail to be significant or fail to be a S/P sentence. It is significant, though; of that we can be sure. So it
must not be a S/P sentence. (See below for a more formal rendering of this argument.) The surface form of the sentence—call this its grammatical form—does not correctly indicate its logical form (i.e., the form that determines the type of proposition it expresses).

If the sentence is significant and not a S/P sentence, then it must be associated with a proposition that is not singular (that is, not about a specific item in particular). But if this is true, then the definite description does not contribute an individual item to that proposition, and so is not a referring expression. Call the referring expressions that do contribute individual items to propositions and so have these as their meanings logically proper names; these alone can serve as the subjects of sentences that are truly of S/P form.

But since the sentence is significant and the proposition complete, the proposition must in some way reflect the definite description. But how? What is the character of the proposition expressed by this sentence? The answer: the sentence is a uniquely existential sentence, and the expression, "the unicorn", is a quantificational expression. The logical form of the sentence is given by the following formula:

$$\exists x (\text{Unicorn}(x) \land \forall y (\text{Unicorn}(y) \rightarrow x = y) \land \text{Tired}(x))$$

A sentence of this form expresses an existential proposition that contains as constituents two properties that are uniquely coinstantiated. It is not a sentence about an individual item—the grammatical form of the sentence makes you think it is about an individual when in fact it is not. The definite description plays two roles here: it signals that the sentence containing it expresses an existential proposition, and it contributes a property to that proposition.

In conclusion, if a sentence appears to be about an individual item, then it is either a S/P sentence with a logically proper name in the subject place, or the grammar of the sentence conceals the fact that it is really a uniquely existential sentence and about no specific individual at all.

**Russell's Argument:**

1. If “the φ is Ψ” (S) is a S/P sentence and is significant, then ‘the φ’ must have a referent.
2. But it is not the case that ‘the φ’ must have a referent.
3. Therefore, it is not the case that S is both a S/P sentence and is significant.
4. That is, it must either be the case that S is not a S/P sentence or that it is not significant.
5. S is significant.

C. Therefore, S must not be a S/P sentence.
Strawson: Russell is wrong. The referring expressions listed above, including definite descriptions, can be used to mention individual items (i.e., they can be used in the uniquely referring way), and when they are used in this way they are neither logically proper names nor Russellian descriptions.

To make this point, Strawson makes several distinctions, both on the side of the sentence and on the side of the referring expression. The distinctions look something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Expression</th>
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<tr>
<td>The sentence itself, understood as a syntactic string, or string of symbols. This string is associated with &quot;general directions for use&quot;, or conventions, that guide one in using it to express a claim.</td>
<td>LINGUISTIC ITEM The expression itself, understood as a syntactic string, or string of symbols. This string is associated with &quot;general directions for use,&quot; or conventions, that guide one in using it to express a claim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The claim, or proposition, expressed by the sentence. This is what is evaluated for truth or falsity.</td>
<td>USE The item mentioned or referred to by the expression. This is the contribution made by the expression to the proposition expressed by the surrounding sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A particular performance, either verbal or in writing, of the sentence.</td>
<td>UTTERANCE A particular performance, either verbal or in writing, of the expression.</td>
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A single sentence can be used in many different ways if it contains what are known as "context sensitive" terms, such as the terms "I", "now", "here", etc.
(e.g., "I am hungry" as uttered by you and by me). Different sentences can be used in the same way: "I am hungry" as uttered by you and "You are hungry" as uttered by me. A single use may be produced by many different utterances of the same sentence or of different sentences (e.g., "I am hungry" produced daily every half hour by a 4-year old), and the same utterance of a single sentence can be associated with different uses. (This last point is debatable, although it can be argued that more than one thing can be said with a sentence at a time.) The same flexibility between item, use, and utterance can be found on the side of the referring expression.

Strawson uses these distinctions to undermine Russell's argument. He argues that Russell's argument is unsound because the first premise is false. One can have a significant S/P sentence with a definite description in the subject place without the description having a referent because the significance of the sentence consists in its conventional associations (i.e., the "general directions for use" of that sentence) and so significance is found at the level of the linguistic item; reference, on the other hand, is found at the level of use. So if you are looking only at a subject/predicate sentence independently of any use of that sentence, you have significance without reference. The claim expressed in the first premise contains a category mistake that arises from conflating the categories of linguistic item and use. In every case, a well-formed S/P sentence is significant without its subject expression having a referent. As a result, the first premise of Russell's argument is false, and the argument is unsound.

The framework deprives the Doctrine of Logically Proper Names of any force, since reference is secured only in a context when the expression is used and is not simply a matter of expression-world relationships. In addition, the failure of the argument undermines the Russelian view of definite descriptions. These two results prompt Strawson to remark that in fact, there are no logically proper names or Russelian descriptions.